

Dance SAC  
Learning Assessment  
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## **Learning Assessment: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**

### **Implementation and Evaluation**

**Hip Hop 2:** In this class students were asked to work together in small groups to choreograph a dance phrase, a minimum of 64 counts, which focused on solving a particular choreographic problem. These problems were written on pieces of paper and each group pulled one from a hat. Once selected, each group focused on how to solve their problem collectively and then presented their study a week later during class time. Each student was also asked to fill out a questionnaire pertaining to the process.

Out of the eleven problems, four were drawn. These were:

- Include slow, fluid movements in your choreography.
- Make your dance a narrative of some kind. Let it tell the viewer a story without using words.
- Create a dance where each dancer performs the same choreography on different levels, facing different directions.
- Incorporate moments of stillness throughout your dance.

The questionnaires the students filled out asked them to address the following questions:

- What choreography problem did your group select to solve?
- What steps did you take to solve your problem?
- How effective was your group in solving the problem?
- If you were to change your process or approach, how might you do that?

Throughout their process, and in-class work time, I interviewed each group informally asking about what steps they were taking to work through their challenge. I then had each group present their study to the class and asked them to explain the problem they had selected to the class as well as outline how they solved the problem. Then, I read the questionnaires they completed in order to look for overarching themes and ideas.

Four out of five of the groups were able to respond to their choreographic problem in a clear, organized manner that made what they were focusing on clear to the viewer. These groups seemed to work more collaboratively, brainstorming together to specifically address their problem before selecting movement, music, etc. Because these groups were focused mostly on the problem at hand they were able to use that as a driving force for all the other creative material. They also used improvisation initially in the process when determining what movement to incorporate. The one group that lacked clarity chose a process in which they started by working individually to create their choreography and then blended their individual sections together later. The study

became directed at selecting movement and accompanying music instead of on the problem they selected to solve. I also found that though almost all of the students were able to solve the problem effectively and appropriately, the majority of students had difficulty articulating how they solved their problem both in class discussion as well as via written responses.

Overall, I think that the assignment was a strong one which pushed the students to examine their process from a different perspective. Some students remarked that having a problem to solve pushed them to explore a concept that they would not have otherwise. Their presentations were creative, engaging, and fun. If repeated, I think a more structured evaluation rubric should be created that gives the students very specific checkpoints to work towards throughout their study.

**Intro to Choreography:** During the course of the term, each student completed five to seven different movement studies, all focused on a different choreographic theme, principle, or concept. Each of these studies was presented in class with the instructor using specific criteria to evaluate student performance. In class discussion students were asked to articulate their process, fielding questions from both their peers as well as the instructor.

The studies for this class focused on space, time, energy, duets, choreographic forms, and sourcing material for choreography. For the majority of the studies evaluation involved looking at: how the focus of each study was addressed; demonstrated knowledge of the sequence; minimum length of sequence; and attention to various choreographic elements. For their fifth study, I asked students to also articulate their process by writing it out on their evaluation worksheet. I found that not only were the students in this class able to solve the problems presented in each study, but that they were largely able to respond to questions of how they solved the problems both in verbal and written response.

The most difficult study proved the one on Time. For this study we focused on duration, tempo, and rhythm. In order to evaluate student understanding of rhythm, I asked them to notate the rhythm of their selected movement using either traditional notation or a simple form I went over in class. This notation was included on their evaluation worksheet. Only a couple of students were able to do this effectively (both with musical training) and we ended up stopping the student presentations to use the class time to work on a study collectively until the students understood the concepts more clearly.

Overall, evaluations for each study were positive with grades ranging in the 80-100% range. Students with lowered grades for studies mostly neglected to incorporate considerations regarding length of the study, or other guidelines versus difficulty demonstrating competency in the concept being worked with. Student ability to offer clear feedback to their peers during showings also improved consistently as the term went on, demonstrating their ability to apply the concepts not only to their own work, but to the work of others.

## **Recommendations**

Overall, I found this process to be helpful in that it gave me a lens through which to focus my evaluation of different class processes on. I found that though many of the students were able to complete tasks, solve problems, and evaluate both their own work as well as the work of others, that they had difficulty articulating their process. I would recommend that this be improved through formal and informal class discussion and written response when appropriate. I also was the sole participant in this assessment from my SAC and would recommend that more part-time faculty become involved in the process to create a more wide-spread and meaningful conversation as to how we can assess outcomes, evaluate class practices, and implement necessary changes.